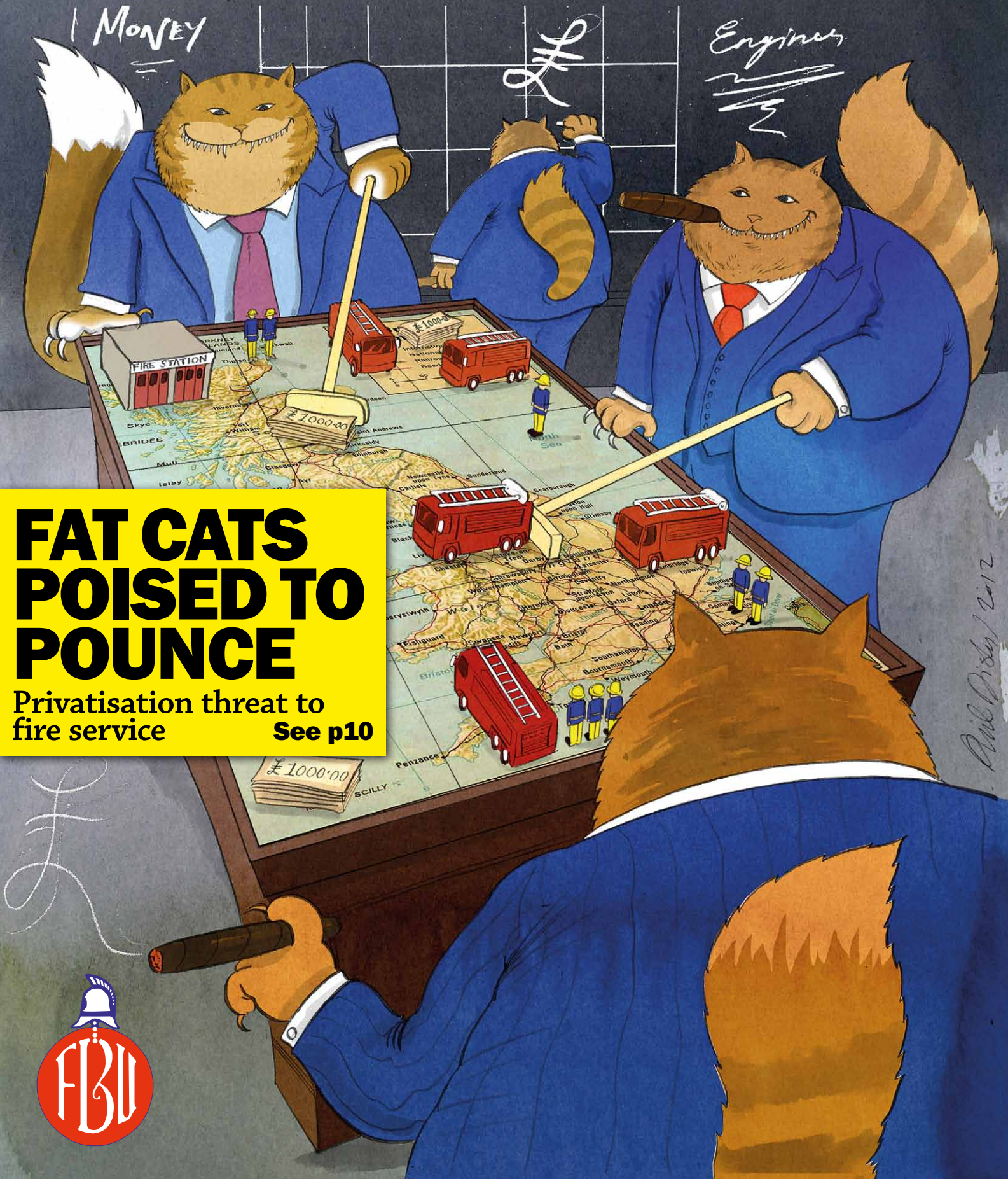


FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union ♦♦♦ www.fbu.org.uk

June/July 2012



**FAT CATS
POISED TO
POUNCE**
Privatisation threat to
fire service **See p10**





Matt Wrack

No more tragedies

The importance and hazards of the job firefighters do was brought home to me again recently when I was in Warwickshire for the legal case relating to the fatal fire at Atherstone on Stour, which killed four of our members in 2007. The FBU continues to provide legal assistance to the bereaved families and has provided or offered separate legal assistance and representation for those charged.

As we go to press one of our members has been found not guilty on the direction of the judge. The final outcome is due very soon. Members should know that work continues on our investigation and on the lessons of this terrible incident. We are very clear that there will be significant lessons to be learned from this tragedy for the entire UK fire and rescue service.

Firefighter safety

Firefighters put themselves on the line every time they attend an incident. Dealing with hazardous situations is part of the job, but we know that managing the risk is a matter of having the right number of firefighters, resources, kit, policies, standard operating procedures and leadership in place. That is why the FBU has always emphasised firefighter safety and its importance for protecting the public. The cost-cutting agenda is driving fire and rescue services to cut corners and grab for quick fixes.

This is well illustrated by efforts to replace properly crewed fire appliances with commercial vans, which put both firefighters and the public at risk as you will see on page 14. The FBU has served safety-critical notices on two fire and rescue services that are experimenting with these vehicles. We want no compromises with safety.

Conference

Fire Brigades Union officials are gearing up for our special conference in Blackpool later this month. Our conferences are a vital part of the union's democracy – it is where we account for our activities over the past year and set out our strategies for the coming period.

This year our conference will discuss some of the most pressing issues facing us. Delegates from every brigade in the UK will have a say on the ongoing campaign to defend our pensions. This has been a hard fight over the last year

and it will continue in the months ahead. But firefighters face multiple threats to our pay, conditions and living standards, as this Tory-led government continues to make workers pay for the economic crisis we did not create.

Later this year the Westminster government will set its central grants for fire and rescue authorities and fire boards, county councils and devolved administrations. With 1,000 firefighter jobs cut in each of the last two years, they have not protected the frontline. The FBU will need to put a robust case for a properly funded fire and rescue service in the coming months. We will also need to ensure our union is well organised and ready for the battles ahead.

Privatisation

The threat from privatisation in all its forms, including new threats from mutuals, will also be discussed at conference. We know the profiteering spivs are seeking to squeeze profits from

our public service. We have already seen the terrible role of AssetCo in two fire and rescue services. But there are new threats on the horizon, such as privatised control rooms and the sell-off of the Fire Service College. Corporate vultures like Falck, Capita, Serco and others are circling.

The union is mapping these threats, including the Trojan Horse of mutuals, which are growing fast in other areas of the public sector. Members need to be alive to these blatant attempts to force the market and private speculators into our great public service. The union's executive council will monitor these developments and plan a strategy for dealing with them. But ultimately we will need members to act to defend public ownership and public control of the fire and rescue service.

Mick Shaw

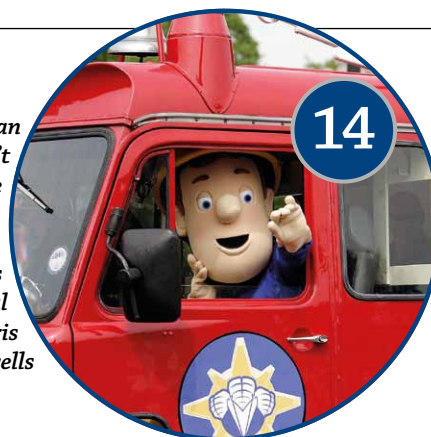
Last month the FBU hosted a memorial meeting to celebrate the life of our former president Brother Mick Shaw, who tragically died of cancer. The meeting provided genuine comfort to Mick's family, friends and comrades, to FBU members and to others who knew him in the labour movement. With pride the gathering commemorated everything that is outstanding in a firefighter's life and one intertwined with building our union. We will need the calm tenacity Mick showed during his time with us for the battles ahead.

There are new threats on the horizon, such as privatised control rooms and the sell-off of the Fire Service College. Corporate vultures like Falck, Capita, Serco and others are circling.

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The news they don't want you to hear

Watch manager not guilty in Atherstone trial

Warwickshire

Paul Simmons – a watch manager accused of the manslaughter of the four firefighters who died in a warehouse fire at Atherstone on Stour, Warwickshire, in 2007 – has been found not guilty.

Judge MacDuff directed the jury that Mr Simmons had no case to answer following the conclusion of prosecution evidence.

He was standing trial at Stafford Crown Court alongside Adrian Ashley, also a watch manager, and station manager Tim Woodward.

As *Firefighter* went to press the case against Adrian Ashley and Tim Woodward was continuing and the trial was expected to conclude by the end of May.

Firefighters Ashley Stephens, Darren Yates-Badley and John Averis died in a vegetable packing plant in Atherstone on Stour on the evening of 2 November 2, 2007. Firefighter Ian Reid died later in hospital.

Mr Simmons said he was “greatly relieved” at the verdict. He thanked his family, supporters, the FBU, his legal team and Warwickshire fire service for their support.

Following the verdict, FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: “We note the verdict and will continue to monitor these legal proceedings.

“We will have further comment to make at the conclusion of the trial.

“As a watch manager,

Paul Simmons is a frontline firefighter.

“He is not and never has been a senior officer, let alone a fire chief, as sometimes reported. The threat of prosecution has been hanging over Paul since November 2007.

“Paul Simmons and his family are greatly relieved at the ‘not guilty’ verdict.

“There are also the families of those who died and our thoughts remain with them as they continue to deal with their tragic loss.

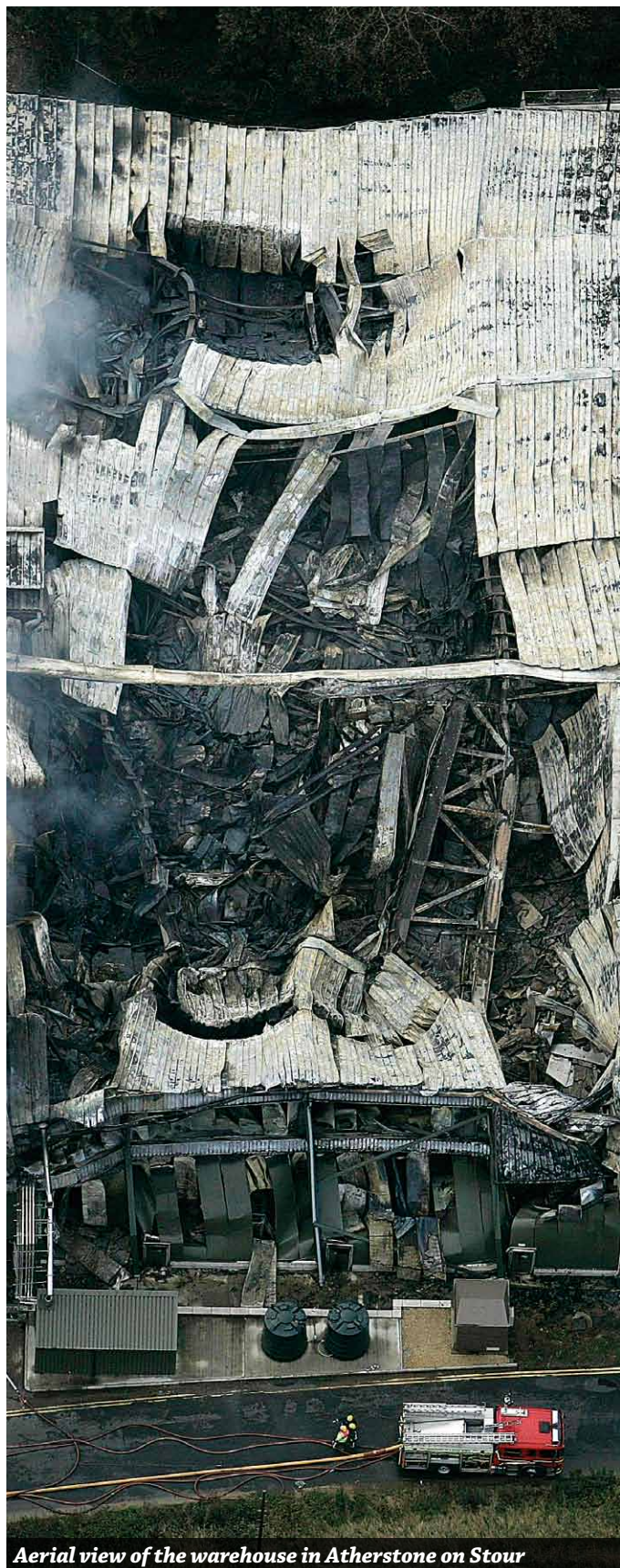
“Those families, the colleagues of those who died and firefighters and officers across the UK want to get to the bottom of what happened on that night.

“We all need to know what happened so that lessons can be learned and we can try to ensure such tragedies are avoided in the future.

“No matter what happens in this case as it proceeds, some of the detail necessary to fully learn lessons and avoid future tragedies may not form part of those proceedings.

“Our concern from other firefighter deaths in recent years is that lessons are not being fully learned or addressed. And that ‘old’ lessons we learned at great cost are being forgotten.

“We have a duty to the families of those who died, their colleagues and firefighters across the UK – who are still going into burning buildings – to learn lessons and to make our work as safe as it can be in the very hazardous and hostile environments that we work in.”



Aerial view of the warehouse in Atherstone on Stour

ANDREW PARSONS/PA PHOTOS

Brendan Barber:
"We need to be
ready to defend
each right that
the government
targets"



Strike ballot over cuts to frontline

Essex

As *Firefighter* went to press Essex fire crews were balloting for strike action in a dispute over frontline cuts and changes forced through without proper negotiation or agreement.

The union has offered to involve both national fire service conciliators and ACAS under nationally agreed procedures to address a range of issues.

The union says a ballot is necessary because the fire authority is pressing ahead with plans for further cuts. There have already been major frontline cuts across Essex fire service.

Brigade secretary Mick Rogers said: "Essex fire crews have suggested a way forward to resolve the issues in dispute. But cuts and imposition of changes have left us with no alternative but to start balloting for strike action."

"The legal timetable for ballots is such that there is more than enough time to resolve the issues between us. Any potential strike action is some way off."

"I would urge the fire authority to respond positively to our proposals to broker an agreement using the nationally agreed procedures rather than ploughing on regardless. They should be in no doubt as to the resolute determination of their own fire crews on these issues."

One in five frontline crews will have been cut since 2008 if further cuts being demanded by managers go ahead. One hundred wholetime firefighter posts have been axed since 2008 with retained crews suffering a cut of 60.

Further cuts now being planned will bring total losses of around one in five frontline firefighters since 2008. Over the same period backroom staff numbers have risen by 7.5% – from 238 to 256.

The latest budget review shows under-spends of £1.6m on wholetime firefighters, £206,000 on retained firefighters and £136,000 on control firefighters.

According to the budget review, tabled on 9 May: "The main areas where

expenditure exceeded the most recent forecast are in information and communication technology."



The FBU has warned of the risk of a cover-up of alleged financial mismanagement and other practices at Essex fire service after the district auditor said she would not investigate any allegations relating to events before 2010.

The union is calling for a transparent and independent investigation into all the allegations of serious financial mismanagement and contentious management practices submitted by the union.

Included in the allegations are a number of disciplinary cases and staff departures with significant cash pay-offs funded by taxpayers.

Some allegations relate to payments to the chief officer for tiling, curtains and carpets at his private home. Another relates to payments for an HR consultant that amounted to more than £800,000 for just over a year's work.

FBU national officer Paul Woolstenholmes said: "We are determined to ensure there is no cover-up."

SOUNDING OFF

We must resist this sly bid to bring back Victorian employment practices

TUC general secretary
Brendan Barber

Your employment rights are under a sly attack. It is not being done with any great fanfare, but the government is slicing away at work rights. Already people have to wait an extra year before they get protection from unfair dismissal. There are proposals to reduce maternity leave and make people pay a fee before taking a claim to an employment tribunal.

The argument that scrapping fair rules at work will boost the economy does not stand up. Unemployment is high and the economy is failing to grow not because employers can't sack women for being pregnant, but because the banks crashed and the government is pressing ahead with deep, fast spending cuts.

We agree with Norman Lamb, the minister who deals with these issues. Before he joined the government this Lib Dem MP said that it would be "madness" to scrap protection against unfair sackings: "It is likely to have the unintended consequence of destabilising consumer confidence at a very difficult time ... It would legitimise Victorian employment practices."

None of this is being done with a big bang. That is why the TUC has launched its "Employee rights stop employment wrongs" campaign. Many of the worst proposals are not yet firm government policy and we have every chance of stopping them.

This is because there are big arguments between ministers. So we need a smart campaign. We need to spread the word so ministers can see that they can't get away with doing this in secret. We will be running ads and publishing leaflets explaining more. And we need to be ready to defend each right that the government targets in the months ahead.

The best way to support the campaign is to visit www.stopemploymentwrongs.org.uk, sign our petition and sign up for updates on future campaign actions.



Lud Ramsey (centre) receives his award from STUC general secretary Grahame Smith (left) and Scottish Labour Party leader Johann Lamont



Alan Paterson



Jim Malone

FBU rep wins equality award

Scottish TUC 2012

Lud Ramsay, an FBU equality rep, has won the Scottish TUC's One Workplace Equality Award for promoting equality. The STUC said Lud, a fire and education officer with Lothian and Borders fire service, had "made an exceptional impact in challenging racism and promoting equality by working with his union and local community".

Lud said: "I hope that winning this award is a reminder to the fire and rescue service and the wider public sector that there is still effort to be made in challenging racism wherever and however it manifests itself,

keeping us all on track with that aspiration of a society free from all types of discrimination."

FBU delegates backed resolutions on pensions, constitutional reform and a Scottish referendum at the 115th STUC in Inverness in April.

The union moved a resolution on Palestine and an emergency resolution supporting refugees and asylum seekers, and seconded an emergency resolution supporting striking fire-fighters at Dundee airport.

Scotland chair Alan Paterson spoke on pensions and Scotland organiser Jim Malone spoke at a Trade Union Co-ordinating Group fringe meeting "Fighting austerity".

Union dismay over £400-an-hour charge for public

West Midlands

West Midlands FBU is dismayed at a fire authority decision to charge the public £412 an hour for a range of services it says are "non-emergencies" including people locked out of their home, pumping water from flooded homes and animal rescues.

Brigade chair Roger Moore said: "This is another attack on the service we provide to the public because of the cut in funding from the government. The public already pay for the fire service and would not expect to have to pay again.

"So far this year there have been cuts to the number of firefighters on fire stations with the loss of 96 frontline jobs. We have also seen a fire station close. The number of frontline firefighters, fire engines and stations will only reduce further if the government drives ahead with further funding cuts."

Cyril Webb

Cyril Webb, a former FBU regional treasurer in Yorkshire and Humberside, died recently

I remember Cyril for his devotion to his family. I will never know how he found time for his second love the Labour Party, and Fire Brigades Union. He drew total respect from all members for his tireless efforts in representing them.

Cyril was a shrewd operator when it came to negotiating. He never backed down in trying to get the best deal and help for his members.

He had a keen sense of humour and was a life long supporter of Barnsley FC.

Cyril will always be remembered by all who knew him, and fondly missed.

John B Gilliver Snr

A life of passion, principle and politics

Mick Shaw

Firefighters, trade unionists and family members packed into TUC Congress House in London last month for a memorial meeting to celebrate the life of Mick Shaw, the former FBU president who died earlier this year.

Mick Shaw joined the London Fire Brigade as a recruit in 1977 and was forged as an FBU activist in the national firefighters' strike that year. He worked as an FBU official in London and served as its executive council member from 1997 to 2007. He was FBU president from 2007 until 2011.

FBU general secretary Matt



Wrack spoke proudly of Mick's tremendous role in the union for over three decades and of his socialist principles.

Jack Shaw told the audience of his father's passion for life, the FBU and for politics.

School friends John Bodill

and Ian Smith recalled the mischief of their shared youth.

Wandsworth firefighter Linda Smith spoke of Mick's strength of character, poise under pressure and his presence on the picket line during the 2010 dispute in London.

Bernard Regan from the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and Martin Gould from the South East region of the TUC praised Mick's involvement in the wider labour movement.

Simeon Andrews read a moving statement from John McDonnell MP.

FBU president Alan McLean closed the meeting with some entertaining anecdotes and an uplifting tribute. The meeting ended with applause for Mick's outstanding contribution.

All speakers remarked on the dignity and culture that Mick Shaw brought to the labour movement. He left a legacy that the FBU is proud to continue.

Youth
unemployment
hits 1,000,000

Eurozone break-up
'could trigger new
Great Depression'

Austerity
blamed
for Britain's
double-dip

ONS figures report 0.3%

**YOU'D THINK THE GOVERNMENT
HAD BETTER THINGS TO DO THAN
ATTACK YOUR RIGHTS AT WORK.**

Elderly 'losing out by
£500m a year in the
funding of care'

KIDS' MISERY AS 1M JOBS AXED IN CRUNCH

A MILLION jobs have been lost
in the credit crunch from sectors

By STEVE HAWKES, Business Editor

Longest slump
in peacetime as
Britain slides
into recession

IT'S NOT AS IF THIS COUNTRY was exactly short of issues. We face urgent problems like a stricken economy, record youth unemployment and the gap between the super-rich and everyone else. Yet the government is devoting precious time and energy to attack, of all things, rights at work.

TUC

A stealthy series of changes that add up to a wholesale assault.

Already an extra year to wait for protection against unfair sackings, with reduced maternity rights and more dangerous workplaces in the pipeline.

These sly attacks have nothing to do with getting the economy moving. They

come from the same people who fought the minimum wage and paid holidays.

By slicing away a bit at a time, they hope no-one will notice. But we have, and you should too.

Visit the website to find out more, and tell ministers they've been rumbled.

**EMPLOYEE RIGHTS
STOP
EMPLOYMENT WRONGS**

VISIT WWW.STOPEMPLOYMENTWRONGS.ORG.UK TO FIND OUT MORE

Kids needs a square meal at school

THE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY IS CAMPAIGNING FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY

About 1.2 million of all school-aged children living in poverty in England – more than half of them – do not receive free school meals. Around 700,000 are not entitled to receive free school meals; a further 500,000 do not take up their meals even though they are entitled to them.

Research by the Children's Society, backed by organisations including the TUC, the National Union of Teachers, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers and 4Children, shows that 91% of UK adults believe that all children living in poverty should receive free school meals.

In this country 2.2 million schoolchildren live in poverty. The Children's Society has launched a campaign to make sure that all of these children, including those from low-income working families, get a free school meal.

Free school meals provide vital financial support for low-income families. For almost a third of children, school lunch is their main meal of the day.

The Children's Society's Fair and Square campaign shows that eligibility for free school meals also has a serious impact on families in low-paid work and those looking to move back into work.

The government's planned introduction of universal credit means that many of the current benefits used to assess who is entitled to free school meals will be scrapped. A completely new system of entitlement is set to be put into place next year.

At the moment lone parents working 16 or more hours a week (24 hours a week for a couple) lose their entitlement to free school meals. Nearly half (45%) of parents are worried about the financial implications of moving back into work or taking additional hours.

Six out of ten parents (60%) say that

free school meal eligibility has a direct impact on their decision to move back into work, or work more hours. One parent surveyed said: "When I move into paid work my income will be lower – school lunches are yet another thing to worry about."

The Children's Society has shown that hundreds of thousands of children live below the poverty line and do not get a free school meal. There is no reasonable defence for this policy failure.

Evidence shows that eating a healthy meal at lunchtime improves children's concentration and can have a positive impact on classroom behaviour. Nutritious school meals for disadvantaged children can also help them to develop healthy eating habits and have the potential to decrease health inequalities.

The government has pledged to end child poverty by 2020.

The Fair and Square campaign is calling for:

- the extension of eligibility for free school meals to all children living in poverty in England by October 2012;
- an increase in the number of local authorities and schools committed to introducing cashless or other non-stigmatising systems for the delivery of free school meals by March 2013;
- a commitment to review and improve the implementation of the guidance on nutritional standards for school meals across local authorities by March 2013.

✦ Visit the campaign website at www.childrenssociety.org.uk/fairandsquare

✦ Sign the Children's Society's petition to ask the government to make sure that all children living in poverty can get a free school meal at <http://action.childrenssociety.org.uk/fair-and-square>

VIEW
FROM THE
AERIAL LADDER
PLATFORM



FIRE SERVICE

Politicians and privatisers are combining to take fire service work out of the public sector and turn it into a source of profit for shareholders and fat cat directors

Privatisers are gearing up for major moves into the fire service despite the disastrous experience of privatisation to date.

AssetCo, which had contracts in London and Lincolnshire, has been restructured to protect its overseas contracts, leaving its UK subsidiaries, including the one with the London contract, in a precarious position.

And a Jersey-based offshore property company that owns five of the still-empty regional control centres has gone into administration, leaving more doubts about private-sector involvement in the fire service.

But neither of these failures has put off the cheerleaders for the private sector. These include the Westminster government, which is planning to sell off the Fire Service College in Wiltshire, and the London Fire Brigade (LFB), which continues to head down the privatisation route despite encountering major problems with AssetCo. LFB training has now been sold to Babcocks, an engineering support services company that is expanding into training and other public sector areas.

The contract to run London's control room has gone to Capita, which describes itself as "The UK's leading provider of business process outsourcing".

According to a *Financial Times* interview with Capita chief executive Paul Pindar, the company is also in talks with a specialist that would help it to introduce emergency services to police and fire brigades nationwide.

He said the contract to run the LFB control room was the first outsourcing of this kind and that the company sees more "opportunities" in this market.

But UK-based Capita and Babcocks are not the only ones looking to get a toehold in the fire service "market".

Falck, which describes itself as a Nordic-based organisation with business activities in 31 countries on

five continents, has also been active, having signed a memorandum of understanding with the Devon and Somerset fire service, although the details are not yet clear.

Key Falck executives have wined and dined, among others, Brian Coleman, chairman and leader of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority until May this year, when he was also chair of the Local Government Association's (LGA) fire services management committee. But Falck did not go as far as AssetCo and send him a hamper.

Without an initial foothold in the fire service market, it could be difficult for a company to make major inroads.

But the political cheerleaders for privatisation are keen to enable those first important steps.

The LGA is pressing for wider privatisation of "key fire brigade services".

Brian Coleman said in a press statement on 20 March: "This means everything needs to be on the table, including mergers of fire services, closer working with other emergency services and outsourcing some of the service we provide."

The LGA claims there is public support for privatisation of fire service management and administration, home fire safety checks and offending and anti-social behaviour work with young people. It suggested this work could be done by "other businesses and organisations".

Toehold

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "At the moment there is a drip, drip, drip approach as the private sector tries to establish a toehold in the fire service. They are smacking their lips at the thought of fire service contracts and, ultimately, will want to provide the emergency service."

"In the NHS the private sector started with cleaning and security contracts and now they are running hospitals. What we will put in place is a campaign to take back what has been privatised and in the long term keep the private sector out of the fire service."

"Lincolnshire has already taken its contract away from AssetCo and back into the public sector. We've called for London to do the same and there is growing political pressure for them to do so."

"Private companies should have no role in owning, controlling or running any key national resources such as the fire service. The private sector looks after its shareholders and directors, AssetCo is a prime example of that."

"AssetCo has brought uncertainty and chaos in its wake. London Fire Brigade has been left standing on the sidelines

'Ultimately, the privatisers will want to provide the emergency service'



London Fire Brigade equipment stockpiled at an AssetCo depot at South Ruislip near London when industrial action was taking place in 2010

CRAN HIBBERT/MAIL ON SUNDAY/STOCK SYNDICATION

ON THE TABLE





IAN MARLOW

The Tory-led government plans to sell off the Fire Service College

An employee newsletter from the private security firm Securitas looking to recruit "emergency fire crew capability" firefighters who, among other roles, would act as strikebreakers in the event of FBU industrial action



waiting to see their next move, but having little control over what happens next to all its operational equipment and that must not be repeated."

Disaster

AssetCo is an ongoing and unfolding disaster for the fire service. But the company has moved to protect its overseas contracts in the United Arab Emirates, leaving the UK subsidiaries badly exposed to its bad debts.

Shareholders are protected while fire service customers face an uncertain future as the company could collapse or be sold.

Welcome to the world of privatised public services. The money gets pocketed when the going is good. When that changes the public are left in the lurch.

There is a serious risk that AssetCo's UK subsidiaries will not survive the burden of debt that has been placed on them. New auditors are still struggling to fully work out the company's accounts.

AssetCo has recently done an about turn on the profits it had claimed for 2009/10. The claimed operating profit of £17.4m has been "restated" as an actual loss of £11.4m, a difference of more than £28m.

The company claimed net assets

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If you would like to join, please contact: Manager - Fire Service, name, branch number, 11 jason.lehan@securitas, nicola.lloyd@securitas.



of £60m. This was, in fact, a deficit of £85m, a difference of £145m.

The errors, the company says, “include the effects of mathematical mistakes, mistakes in applying accounting policies, oversights or misinterpretations of facts, and fraud”.

AssetCo is still struggling with its recently published set of accounts for the 18-month period to 30 September 2011. Preparing these accounts, it says, “has been hampered by the absence of those involved in the past financial statements, the lack of financial records, complexity of past accounting practices, and the going-concern issues associated with the continuing bank and customer support for the UK subsidiaries”.

It acknowledged that its UK subsidiaries were in serious trouble including all of its London and Lincolnshire contracts.

AssetCo directors, it said, “have therefore concluded that there are material uncertainties relating to events and conditions that cast significant doubt about the ability of these companies to continue as a going concern.”

As a result, “the board intends to either refinance or sell the London group, and consider options for the Lincoln business.”

Lincoln fire service has taken that decision out of AssetCo’s hands and brought the contract back into the public sector.

Records not kept

The company’s new auditors said: “We have not obtained all the information and explanations that we considered necessary for the purpose of our audit; in our opinion, adequate accounting records have not been kept by the parent company; and we have been unable to establish whether all disclosures of directors’ remuneration specified by law have been made.”

These directors – John Shannon and Frank Flynn – have both gone. But the buying, selling and restructuring to protect the shareholder interest goes on.

Finding out who or what owns LFB’s entire operational asset base is no easy matter. Ownership is vested in a complex web of related companies selling and buying each others’ shares, but all leading back to AssetCo plc.

AssetCo Emergency Ltd sold all its shares in AssetCo London Ltd and AssetCo Engineering Ltd to Continental Shelf 547 Ltd. AssetCo Lincoln Ltd shares were sold to Continental Shelf 548 Limited.

But the entire issued share capital of Continental Shelf 547 and 548 is owned by AssetCo plc.

Errors included mathematical mistakes, oversights and fraud

This is not the only activity that has gone on. AssetCo went back and forward to the courts protecting payments to current directors before payments to creditors. And this had a clear impact on how the company was looking after London’s appliances.

FBU London regional secretary Paul Embery said: “A lot of time, effort and money was put in by the company to look after itself, its directors and shareholders. There was far less energy put into delivering for London Fire Brigade.

“There is huge additional effort being put in by fire service officers to try and make the system work.

“I can’t remember the last time I heard the company talk about its contractual obligations. It’s all about them; it’s all about their money.

“The biggest let-down was the fire authority. This privatisation disaster should have given them pause for thought, but they have accelerated the programme and ploughed on regardless.

“We’ve now got Babcocks with the firefighter training contract and Capita going to run the new control centre. It’s as if there is no learning curve.”

London’s new control in south London was built as part of the failed FiReControl project through a private developer scheme (PDS). A PDS is not to be mistaken for a PFI deal – it is even worse value for the taxpayer.

Some of the regional control buildings – most of which remain empty with the leases still paid by the taxpayer – have been bought and sold on several times. Five of the centres are owned by The Control Centre General Partner Ltd.

This is a tax avoidance set-up, even though all the rents come from the taxpayer. The company is based offshore in Jersey and is a vehicle of a private equity group, Evans Randall.

Guaranteed rent

Some of the company’s directors are also directors of companies owning other regional control centres (RCCs), including one in the north west.

The company was put into administration by Lloyds Bank and the five regional centres it owns are up for sale for £107m. They will rake in close to £200m in rents alone over the period of their leases.

Expect a lot of interest at that price. As the marketing material points out, the RCCs “are likely to appeal to investors because of the guaranteed government rent”.

Canada Life owns one RCC. One of its directors is George Bain whose review of the fire service for the government in 2002 turned it into a disaster zone.

But Bain is still managing to make a buck out of it.





DAFT YET DEADLY

Crews and public at risk
as under-equipped vans
replace fire appliances

“Fireman Sam would not run Pontypandy fire station like this, never mind the whole of Mid and West Wales,” was the withering response of FBU Wales regional secretary Chris Howells to the service’s introduction of small vans to replace fire appliances.

But Mid and West is not the only service to try its own version of “Honey, I shrunk the fire service”.

South Yorkshire fire authority has its own variation on the theme. It is “small fires units” crewed by no more than two firefighters.

South Yorkshire FBU has pointed out that almost every large fire starts as a small fire. Crews of the new units do not know what is facing them until they arrive – without the equipment, personnel or training to start offensive firefighting.

Disaster

It could be the start of the latest wheeze by the chief officers’ daft ideas club – a follow up to the disaster of combined aerial rescue platforms (CARPs) which were too big, too heavy and cost a fortune.



Spot the difference: left, Mid and West Wales' van; above, Fireman Sam

The Mercedes Sprinter vans planned for Mid and West Wales have been named "rural response pumps" (RRPs) and have very limited firefighting equipment. They are to be the primary response to dwelling fires.

Their equipment is:

- one 450-litre water tank supply;
- one high-pressure hose reel;
- one ultra-high-pressure hose reel.

The FBU has warned that managers' plans to replace 14 fire appliances with vans carrying a reduced firefighting capability risk firefighter and public safety. The vans do not have enough water in their tank to put out a fire in a single room in a house.

Crews have been told if they are first to arrive at a fire in a van they will have to wait for normal-size pumping appliances to get there before they can enter a burning building, even if people are inside. It could take between 15 and 30 minutes for a water tender to arrive, putting the lives of firefighters and the public at risk.

The union has accused managers of multiple breaches of health and safety legislation and the Welsh government's own standards on responses to dwelling fires.

Vans will shortly replace proper pumping appliances in Port Talbot, Morriston and Milford Haven and nine other stations. All of these locations have major industrial risks as well as domestic ones.

Chris Howells said: "These vans have very limited firefighting capability compared to what they are replacing. They do not have the firefighting capability on board to immediately deploy fire crews into a developed property fire, even if people are trapped."

Wait outside

"Crews have been told they will have to wait outside a burning building until an appliance arrives with enough water to suppress the fire and start rescues."

"When firefighters see people trapped in a burning building they will be under huge pressure to enter and attempt rescues at enormously increased risk. That is why they have to arrive with enough personnel and equipment to take immediate offensive action, not to stand around outside."

"There will be intolerable pressure on incident commanders, leaving them vulnerable if anything goes wrong."

"These vans do not even have enough

water to stop the spread of fire to other buildings."

"Principal managers have foolishly stated that you only need half a bucket of water to put out most house fires these days. In 28 years of service I have never been able to put out a house fire with half a bucket of water."

The FBU has served the service with a safety critical notice stating that the firefighting equipment carried on the RRP is nowhere near adequate for attending and dealing with a property fire as a primary response vehicle.

A recent Mid and West Wales fire service procedural alert on the use of covering jets does not allow incident commanders to set up a covering jet when they are first at a property fire where there are signs and symptoms of backdraught and/or flashover and crews need to commit in breathing apparatus to perform a rescue or to begin offensive firefighting actions.

The service claims it is wrong to continue the practice of using a compulsory safety jet even though this was introduced after recommendations from the Health and Safety Executive improvement notice following the Blaina tragedy.

Firefighters Kevin Lane and Stephen Griffin died after rescuing a child from a house fire in Blaina, South Wales, in February 1996. They returned to search for a second child but were killed in a delayed backdraught.

There are safety concerns in South Yorkshire as well over the so-called small fires units. The FBU there has also served a safety critical notice setting out multiple breaches of health and safety legislation and regulations.

Limited capacity

The South Yorkshire "units" are commercial vans painted fire service red with blue lights and high visibility stripes. They have limited water capacity and only have a crew of two or three firefighters.

FBU brigade secretary John Gilliver said: "Firefighters will be put at intolerable risk at incidents if they are deployed in these vans."

"If a small fire has spread to a building with people inside, then two or three firefighters are not enough to deal with that safely."

"These vans mean there will be too few firefighters, greatly increasing the risk to the few firefighters at the scene who will be under pressure to act."

"Firefighters have been killed in situations where there is a lack of personnel, equipment and training."

A HELPING HAND TO SECURE JUSTICE

FBU legal assistance does not stop at work-related matters – members, including retired ones, and their families can have access to top solicitors if they suffer accidents outside work

Firefighter readers will be well aware of the FBU's successful legal actions to secure justice and employment rights for members. And many will know of someone helped by the union to secure compensation when an injury at work has cost them money.

But did you know that you and your family can also get legal assistance for a range of accidents that are not work-related – even if you are retired?

Over the last two years Thompsons has secured £8.9m compensation for FBU members and their families.

Experienced

Paul Woolstenholmes, FBU national officer for legal services, told *Firefighter*: "If it's an employment-related matter, then clearly we're here to help members.

"But a lot of members don't realise that we can also give them access to services from Thompsons, the UK's most experienced personal injury lawyers.

"That includes legal assistance for family members injured outside the workplace. I'd like more members to be aware and to use the excellent service we can provide."

Thompsons solicitor Doug Christie agrees. "Legal aid for personal injury claims is now non-existent," he says, "so the FBU's support can be valuable. We can help get you the money owed to you, but it is not the compensation lottery figures of tabloid mythology.

"You are entitled to compensation for financial losses you have suffered or are going to suffer in the future. And the money helps you to recover financially from an accident caused by someone else. It does not reduce the physical injury, the pain or suffering.

"When you are injured it is a fight to secure compensation from the large multinational insurers with teams of lawyers all set up to say 'No'. Thompsons is there to level the playing field a bit on behalf of anyone who is injured and who has a legitimate claim."

FBU members and retired members are benefiting from access to some of the UK's top personal injury lawyers.

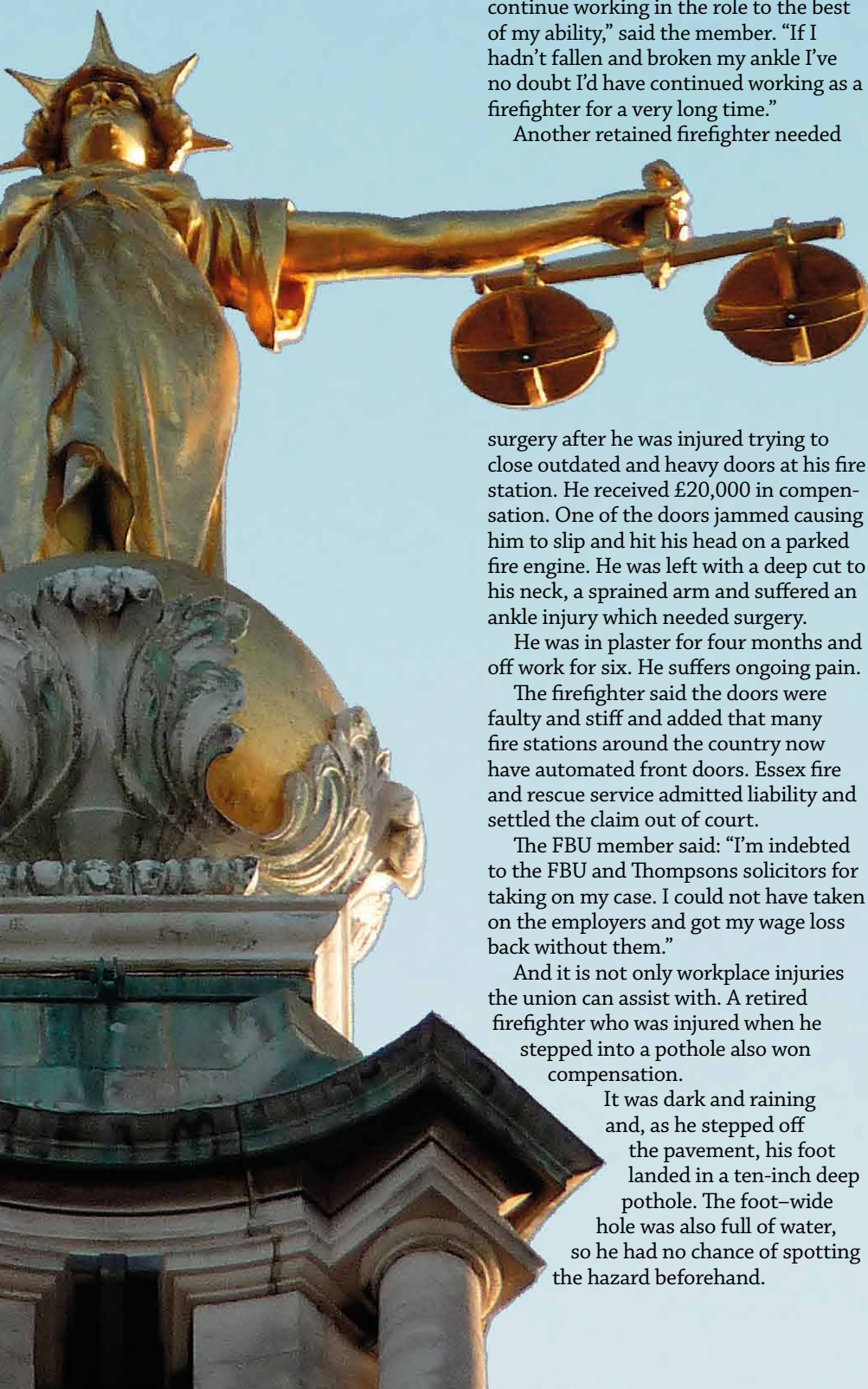
Take the case of an FBU member in Wales who had to give up his ten-year career as a retained firefighter after he broke his right ankle when he tripped on

FBU solicitors Thompsons are there to help level the playing field when multinational insurance companies say "No"

Legal helpline number

0808 100 6061

**Scotland only
0800 0891 331**



uneven ground during a weekly exercise wearing breathing apparatus.

As a result of his injury he was unable to work as a leading firefighter for 12 months and when he returned it was on light duties. He soon realised that the extent of his injuries meant he could not fulfil the role as he wished and handed in his notice. South Wales fire and rescue authority denied liability but settled the claim out of court.

"I loved working as a retained firefighter but after the accident I couldn't continue working in the role to the best of my ability," said the member. "If I hadn't fallen and broken my ankle I've no doubt I'd have continued working as a firefighter for a very long time."

Another retained firefighter needed

surgery after he was injured trying to close outdated and heavy doors at his fire station. He received £20,000 in compensation. One of the doors jammed causing him to slip and hit his head on a parked fire engine. He was left with a deep cut to his neck, a sprained arm and suffered an ankle injury which needed surgery.

He was in plaster for four months and off work for six. He suffers ongoing pain.

The firefighter said the doors were faulty and stiff and added that many fire stations around the country now have automated front doors. Essex fire and rescue service admitted liability and settled the claim out of court.

The FBU member said: "I'm indebted to the FBU and Thompsons solicitors for taking on my case. I could not have taken on the employers and got my wage loss back without them."

And it is not only workplace injuries the union can assist with. A retired firefighter who was injured when he stepped into a pothole also won compensation.

It was dark and raining and, as he stepped off the pavement, his foot landed in a ten-inch deep pothole. The foot-wide hole was also full of water, so he had no chance of spotting the hazard beforehand.

He suffered a broken right foot which needed to be in plaster for six weeks and then needed a splint for a further period of time. He returned to the place of the accident to take photographs of the hazard to help provide evidence.

"I knew it was important to take photographs of the hazard straight away as the hole could have been fixed by the time my claim was entered," says the member, who still suffers from residual pain in his ankle. "I'd urge anyone who has a similar accident to get evidence in this way. It certainly helped my case to run smoothly."

Compensated

Kevin Brown, FBU regional secretary for the north west, where the member lives, said: "We provide legal services to all of our members, including those who are now retired. Our member was injured through no fault of his own, disrupting his life significantly for a number of weeks. It is only right that he was compensated."

And even in the wake of tragedy the union can help. The family of a teenager who was killed in a car crash has received damages for his death from the car driver's insurers. The teenager died in a head-on collision after the driver of a car he was a passenger in misjudged a corner, lost control of the vehicle and hit an oncoming BMW head-on. The driver was jailed for dangerous driving for 32 months.

His parents were advised by the police to pursue compensation. His firefighter father contacted the FBU for help.

As he did not have any dependents, the family recovered only the costs of their son's funeral and some other expenses. His dad said: "He was a popular boy who lived life to the full. He was our world. We never expected to lose him in such a way and claiming compensation was the last thing on our mind."

"It was the police who suggested that we should pursue a claim and I knew that my trade union offered a free legal service. From the moment the FBU and Thompsons were instructed we've been able to let them get on with the legalities whilst we've tried to come to terms with his death.

"The compensation will never make up for the gaping hole that is now in our lives, and claiming was never about achieving that, it was about trying to achieve some sense of justice. It will cover the costs of his funeral, something we never planned for – we never imagined we'd be burying our child."

INSURANCE

Court victory for asbestos victims

Insurance companies have been disputing their liability to pay compensation

Mesothelioma – a cancer of the lining of the lungs – is caused by inhaling dust containing asbestos. There is no cure and it is never diagnosed until decades after the initial exposure.

Insurers of negligent employers have tried over a long period to exploit the delay between the exposure and diagnosis of the disease. Decades later there is often no

insurance in place and the employers themselves have often gone out of business.

The FBU has provided legal representation through its solicitors Thompsons for scores of firefighters who have been diagnosed with mesothelioma.

Thompsons is one of the few law firms to have specialised legal teams with years of experience in taking these complex cases.

Inhaling dust

Firefighters have been required to attend fires in homes and buildings such as schools and hospitals where asbestos was present, and without any protection against inhaling asbestos dust. Instructions to wear breathing apparatus have only been issued sporadically despite the known asbestos risk, particularly in buildings where asbestos is present.

Four insurance companies have been disputing their liability to pay compensation to UK victims of mesothelioma.

A Supreme Court ruling on the case in March will help many of the 2,500 workers who

are diagnosed with mesothelioma each year and thousands of others who suffer from other industrial diseases.

The ruling slammed the door shut on the loophole the insurance companies were trying to exploit. Insurers dragged out the legal action for six years and many victims died without knowing whether the outcome of their claims would benefit their families.

Since 1972 employers' liability insurance has been compulsory for all private sector employers. Even before it became compulsory, insurance cover was widespread, to protect employers from claims for industrial injury, accidents and disease caused by work.

The mesothelioma case turned on the wording of insurance contracts signed by the employers that were in place when victims were

exposed to the asbestos fibres at work several decades ago.

The wording of each policy required the worker to have "sustained" or "contracted" the disease — in this case mesothelioma — during the term of the policy in order to trigger the insurance cover. The insurers argued that the disease was not "sustained" or "contracted" when the asbestos fibres were inhaled, but instead when the disease appeared, typically 30 years after inhalation.

Negligent

If the Supreme Court had agreed with the insurers they would have been able to avoid paying compensation to the victims of negligent employers.

In his judgment, Lord Clarke concluded that: "The whole purpose of these policies was to insure employers against liability to their employees. That

purpose would be frustrated if the insurers' submissions on this point were accepted."

The judgment went on to emphasise that these principles apply not only to mesothelioma but also to other industrial diseases.

The result was welcomed by Doug Christie of Thompsons who had taken the claim on behalf of the union Unite. "The insurance companies tried to create and exploit a loophole to deny compensation to thousands of families," he said. "Only a trade union could have taken these claims against multinational insurers with millions of pounds to throw at the case."

He said most people's perceptions of insurance companies were formed by adverts on TV emphasising how helpful the companies will be in the event of a claim. "In this case they have had to be forced to the highest court in the land in a six-year legal battle to pay out," he said.

The TUC welcomed the judgment, but said many people might remain unable to get compensation because their employer's insurer cannot be traced.

The TUC wants the government to set up an employers' liability insurance bureau to make it easier to trace employers' policies.

Unions want a "fund of last resort" in cases where the employer is insolvent and insurers cannot be traced. This would be similar to the Motor Insurers' Bureau which covers claims against uninsured drivers.



Unrefined white asbestos. Fibres can also be blue grey, green, or brown and are highly toxic when inhaled as dust

R. MASON/NEVE/PHOTO DIFFUSION/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

Legal Beagle

Changes to unfair dismissal



Q I have heard there have been changes in the right to claim unfair dismissal. How will this affect members?

A The government has introduced a number of reforms to employment laws which reduce employment protection for employees and access to an employment tribunal.

The most significant change is the extension of the qualifying period for unfair dismissal from one to two years, starting 6 April 2012.

The statutory right to claim unfair dismissal is still available to employees who believe they have been dismissed unfairly or unreasonably by their employer. However, if they started their job on or after 6 April, they will need to have been in continuous employment with their employer for two years before they can pursue a claim.

For instance, an employee who started working for their employer on 21 March 2011 and was dismissed on 4 April 2012 can bring a claim of unfair dismissal as they only need one year's service to qualify.

However, a colleague who started working on 21 April 2012 and was dismissed on 28 April 2013 could not bring a claim as they would not have the necessary two years' service.

The qualifying period for the right to receive a written statement from an employer of the reasons for dismissal has also increased from one to two years.

Q What other changes has the government introduced and how will they affect members' claims?

A Employment judges will usually now hear unfair dismissal cases alone. This means that "wing members" who have traditionally sat with the judge and usually have a background in industrial relations, will no longer be there to enable the judge to better understand the issues in the claim and to ensure that the evidence is properly scrutinised.

It is too early to say how this will affect members' claims, but the role of wing members is to enable the tribunal to collectively make a fair and just decision. Without them there

is a risk that some claimants will not get a fair hearing.

Another reform that undermines access to justice is that witness expenses will no longer automatically be paid by the tribunal. The parties to the tribunal claim may be ordered to pay them themselves. This could deter people who have been treated unfairly by their employer from pursuing justice if they fear they will have to pay the travel costs of colleagues who have agreed to give evidence to the tribunal.

Finally, witness statements will no longer automatically be read out in tribunals. While this may speed things up, there is a risk that the tribunal will not be familiar with the statements. Anyone representing a member at a tribunal

should ensure that statements have been read by the tribunal and that they request that certain evidence is given in person if necessary.

Q What are the requirements for employers to report an accident at work?

A RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) requires employers, and anyone else with responsibility for health and safety within a workplace, to report and keep records of:

- work-related deaths
- serious injuries
- cases of diagnosed industrial disease
- certain "dangerous occurrences" (near-miss accidents).

The requirement used to be for employers to report when an employee was "incapacitated" – absent from or unable to do work that is part of their normal duties – for over three days. But the government increased this to over seven days from 6 April 2012.

The number of days does not include the day the accident happened.

Employers and others with responsibilities under RIDDOR must still keep a record of all over-three-day injuries – if the employer has to keep an accident book, then this record will be enough.

The deadline by which the over-seven-day injury must be reported has also increased to 15 days from the day of the accident.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Trust and devotion repaid not betrayed

Yvonne Robertson is devoted to rescues at work – and in her time off when she helps to run a charity that saves scores of dogs from early and undeserved death

Scottish Greyhound Sanctuary

When Yvonne Robertson is not on duty answering emergency calls at Strathclyde fire and rescue service control, she can probably be found helping to make life better for racing and hunting dogs at risk of being destroyed.

Yvonne is treasurer of Scottish Greyhound Sanctuary (SGS), a registered charity that matches dogs that deserve a new life beyond the racetrack or hunt with new homes.

At the home Yvonne shares with her partner there are five dogs, including two placed through SGS. All members of the SGS committee are greyhound or lurcher owners.

The charity – founded four years ago – is very practical. It is committed to furthering the welfare of retired dogs and saving them from destruction.

It is a fate that each year awaits thousands of greyhounds whose competing days are over. Some are only two years old and could have lived for another decade.

“Lurchers suffer a similar fate when they are ‘too old’ to run down prey or suffer an injury,” says Yvonne. The charity offers a practical solution by linking caring dog lovers with hounds that need to start a new life beyond the track or field. SGS gets results. Last year it found new homes for 95 dogs.

“These dogs are very gentle and loving and are

devoted to their owner/trainer, but their trust and devotion is betrayed and what is left is a beaten, down-trodden animal that wants to be loved.

“Times are changing as more and more trainers and owners are choosing to attempt to home their dogs through the many greyhound rescue organisations. We need to be seen as a ‘good option’ for the people within the racing industry and therefore, if we are able to raise our profile, it may encourage more of them to release their dog to our care instead of how they were dealt with before, which was to be simply destroyed, sometimes humanely, sometimes not. That is why we do what we do.”

Before anyone can rehome a dog through SGS, there are home visits and assessments to ensure the dog’s needs can be met. “We always try to ensure we match the right dog to the right home,” says Yvonne.

She and other volunteers are at the end of the phone or available through email for post-adoption advice. It’s all part of the service.

There is also a thriving online community for anyone interested in the welfare of rescue dogs – from sharing advice, to helping raise awareness of their plight, and to offering a dog a new home.

Dogs are settled far away from stress and trauma, for some long-deserved comfort amid appropriate exercise.

“We call it the forever sofa,” says Yvonne, part



Some are only two years old and could have lived for another decade

Yvonne Robertson with rescued hounds Toby and Molly and (left) Sparky and Ellie





YVONNE ROBERTSON

When she is not working at Strathclyde fire control or taking care of her five dogs, Yvonne Robertson's role as treasurer of the Scottish Greyhound Sanctuary includes keeping the books, fundraising, overseeing merchandising and contact with new owners

'Dogs are settled far away from stress and trauma. We call it the forever sofa'

of the eight-strong volunteer committee that is supported by a network of dedicated volunteers. "We are run solely by volunteers and do it for the love of the breed." SGS asks for a minimum donation of £85 from people who adopt a dog. All greyhounds are neutered and micro-chipped before homing. Homing packs include a leather collar and muzzle, as well as a booklet providing useful information for settling in your new hound.

As well as taking care of money matters, Yvonne's other SGS duties include fundraising, overseeing merchandising and follow-up co-ordinator. So, during her days off from work, she's "usually attending events, transporting dogs or arranging or carrying out home checks". She also keeps in phone contact with new owners, volunteers and with members and supporters through the SGS forum website.

The charity's reputation for offering practical support to vulnerable dogs has reached way beyond Scotland. It has benefitted dog rescuers in Spain and one hound's new family recently flew from Jersey in their private plane to collect a couple of SGS dogs.

Fundraising

Fundraising is, of course, vital: there are street collections during the Edinburgh Festival and at pet shops in and around Edinburgh and Glasgow. Photo contests and other fundraisers also help greyhounds and lurchers find new homes.

Yvonne's colleagues at the Strathclyde fire control centre in Johnstone have been knitting squares for a massive multi-coloured dog blanket. It will be auctioned online later this year for the charity.

Three new purpose-built kennels mean SGS can cut down on boarding kennel fees and channel cash saved to help more hounds find homes.

Yvonne and her partner Dave, a crew commander, give their five lively dogs a loving home. Two are SGS hounds. "There's Toby, a lurcher (whippet-terrier cross we think)," Yvonne explains. "He's around six years old. Molly, a deerhound-poodle cross, has not long turned one." Then there's Ellie – a five-year-old German shepherd, Jenna, a deerhound-lurcher who is 11, and Sparky, a three-year-old labrador-collie cross.

SGS is thriving – but more cash and volunteers are always needed. And, of course, more awareness about the fate dogs can face if they are not rescued.

Pictures of homeless hounds seeking a new start can be found on the charity's website: www.scottishgreyhoundsanctuary.com; phone 0845 6439335



Win these Jaybird Bluetooth headphones

To win these Jaybird Sportsband 2 Bluetooth headphones send your answers by 31 July 2012 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (June/ July 2012), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Please include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

1 What drink associated with summer began life in 1823 as a gin-based digestif and was named after the London oyster bar owner who concocted it?

- A) Campari
- B) Benedictine
- C) Pimm's
- D) Cointreau

2 Wakes week referred to the week's holiday enjoyed by mill workers from which part of the UK?

- A) Devon and Cornwall
- B) Lancashire and Cheshire
- C) London
- D) East Anglia



3 In 1953, a dish called "Coronation chicken" was created for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II by Constance Spry and ...

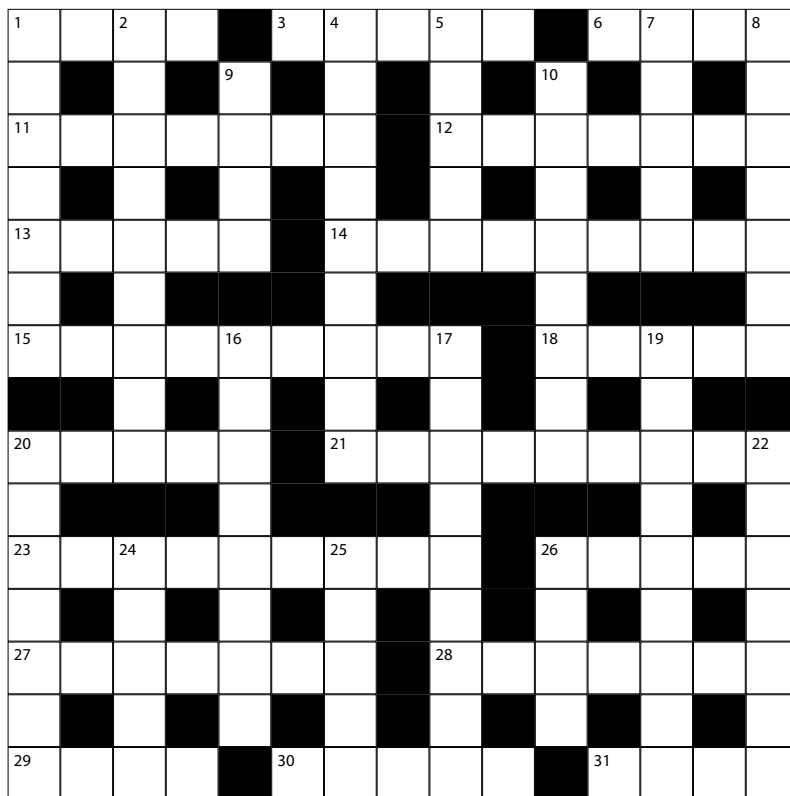
- A) Rosemary Hume
- B) The Roux brothers
- C) Fanny Cradock
- D) Graham Kerr

4 Taking their name from a beach on the Lagoon of Venice, 169 of these were built across the UK in the 1930s ...

- A) Jesolo
- B) Piazza
- C) Piscina
- D) Lido

5 Which Olympic Games were known as 'The Austerity Olympics'?

- A) 1908
- B) 1936
- C) 1948
- D) 1968



CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1** Use acid on metal to create printing plate (4)
- 3** Matt, 2005 onwards (5)
- 6** Cook in oven (4)
- 11** Ken, 1980-2000 (7)
- 12** Look closely at; interrogate (7)
- 13** Terry, 1964-1980 (5)
- 14** Put into practice; tool (9)
- 15** Laid back, not hard to get along with (4-5)
- 18** Excellent (in an old-fashioned kind of way?); abbreviation for senior police officer (5)
- 20** Entrance hall of cinema, theatre, etc (5)
- 21** Made void (9)
- 23** Refill, re-stock, refresh (9)
- 26** Form of warfare - group of students (5)
- 27** Illness (7)
- 28** John Lennon song (7)
- 29** Song or piece of music for two (4)
- 30** Angry (5)
- 31** Root vegetable yielding high levels of sugar (4)

DOWN

- 1** One who gets away (7)
- 2** Disliking publicity or limelight (6-3)
- 4** Handing over of (possibly illegal); Reese Witherspoon film; performance of artistic piece (9)
- 5** Inexpensive (5)
- 7** Live; put up with (5)
- 8** Voter (7)
- 9** Beer-horse (or the cart it pulls) (4)
- 10** Travel off-shore, towed on a pair of thin platforms (5-3)
- 16** One with green-fingers (8)
- 17** Andy, 2000-2005 (9)
- 19** What ConDem government wants to do with public services it doesn't cut altogether (9)
- 20** Inappropriately friendly?; not backward! (7)
- 22** Pudding (7)
- 24** If you haven't got one, you're dead! (5)
- 25** Bury; Latin prefix meaning 'among' or 'between' (5)
- 26** Blacken with fire (4)

Last month's answers and winners



Crossword solution May

May quiz answers

- 1. C - 6
- 2. C - Christmas Day
- 3. D - Blur
- 4. C - '... your chains'
- 5. D - Beltane
- 6. C - 1978


Winner of the April quiz
Chris Balcombe, Devon

Station Cat Quacker sends them bonkers

*Nothing to lose
but his chains
of office: Brian
Coleman's
electors kicked
him off the
Greater London
Authority*



Decision time

 Embarrassing, of course, but your Cat cannot shirk the truth. The Taxpayers' Alliance agrees with the Fire Brigades Union.


They both say that levying a charge to call out the fire brigade if the incident isn't that serious is one of the most idiotic ideas that even this idiotic government has come up with.

So has the Taxpayers' Alliance – a group of right-wingers that spends its time attacking public service – suddenly seen the light?

Your Cat rang them, and a rather excitable lady called Emma, with an alarming cut-glass accent, said: "Look, if the fire service doesn't believe it's an emergency they shouldn't answer it."

So how are they to decide what's an emergency and what isn't? "It's not for us to decide that," said Emma, sounding just a tiny bit irritated.

Water fowl

 So what would Emma and the Taxpayers' Alliance have done about the duck? You remember the duck. The Cat wrote about it in the last *Firefighter*.

This is the duck that got itself caught up in a plastic bag on a South London pond.

Firefighters were called out, but told not to go into the water. The rescue was undertaken by a wildlife expert instead. And the Taxpayers' Alliance and its friends

in the *Daily Mail* screamed "Elf and safety gone mad" until they were hoarse.


Now, either they think firefighters should have rescued the creature, or they think firefighters shouldn't have come out. Which is it?

"They shouldn't have attended. And when they did attend, they should have rescued the bird," said Emma triumphantly, and then, to the Cat's inexpressible joy, she added: "It's health and safety gone bonkers."



JEFF MOORE/PA PHOTOS

Nice work


 We're all in it together, part 597. Remember Lord

Hutton (above), who provided the government with the arguments it required to cut public service pensions, and, as a former New Labour minister, provided

political cover by making cutting pensions sound like something all political parties agreed upon?

Well, Lord Hutton also chairs the civil service pension administrators. And picks up a cool £1,000 a day for doing so. "I am a very strong supporter of what this government is trying to do," he says. Well, he would be, wouldn't he?

Sneer today ...

 Far be it from your Cat to kick a man when he's down. Unless, of course, the man's Brian Coleman, former political boss of the London fire service, and a man who, like Pooh-Bah in *The Mikado*, was born sneering.

He spent his time at the top trying to hive off as much of London's fire service as he could to AssetCo – a badly run and financially unstable company – and getting headlines for denigrating firefighters.

So forgive us if we dance a jig at the news that the voters of Barnet and Camden kicked him off the Greater London Authority, which means he can't be reappointed to the fire service job, and even London mayor Boris Johnson didn't have the brass neck to co-opt him.

He's still a Barnet councillor, but he's been ejected from the cabinet, no longer deemed fit to run Barnet's environmental policies. Suddenly your Cat is full of the joys of this lovely springtime.

Not all there

 A small Welsh town is pondering a mystery as

complex and unknowable (at least to an English-purring Cat) as its name, which is Gwaun Cae Gurwen.


It used to have a nearby fire station with whole-time firefighters.

But the former chief fire officer for Mid and West Wales, one Doug McKay, managed to persuade his authority that it could safely downgrade the station, bringing it down from 28 firefighters to 12, if the authority provided a new fire station staffed with retained firefighters.


So they got the retained firefighters – but they never provided the new fire station or any fire engines to go with it. The retained firefighters are there, ready and willing to earn their money.

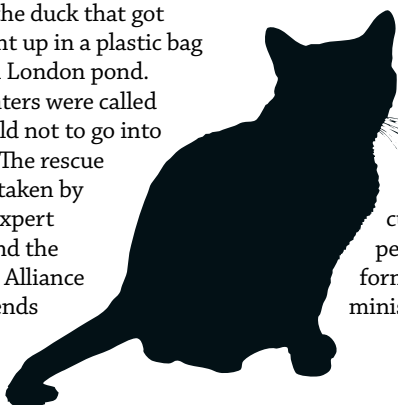
But without a fire engine, they can't. It's called being lean and efficient, apparently.

Drive on

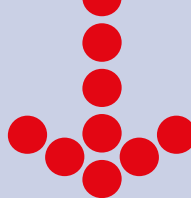
 Still, you'll be relieved to hear that the economy drive does not stretch to all forms of transport in Mid and West Wales. The chief fire officer still drives around in the fire service's BMW M3 and the deputy chief in a top of the line Jaguar.

Uaill fail

 Strathclyde Fire and Rescue named their splendid new headquarters "Uaill" under the mistaken impression that the word is Gaelic for pride. Actually, it's more accurately translated as vanity or arrogance. In Strathclyde, pride goes before a fall.



25-year badges



Chris Harburn (r), Spennymoor, Durham, receives his 25-year badge from regional health and safety rep Andy Mitchell



Brian Melland (c), Ladywood, West Midlands, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Andy Dennis (r). Branch rep Richard Field (l) and region 7 EC member Rose Jones look on



Mark Sutton (l), Tettenhall, West Midlands, receives his 25-year badge from Walsall branch secretary Steve Palmer with (l-r) Dan Burke, West Sussex, and Mark Lee, retired



John Callaghan (c), Ladywood, West Midlands, receives his 25-year badge from region 7 EC member Rose Jones (l) and branch rep Richard Field



Ted Edwards (c), green watch, Ladywood, West Midlands, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Andy Dennis (l) and branch rep Richard Field



Nigel Price (l), Llanwrtyd Wells, Mid and West Wales, receives his 25-year badge from brigade membership secretary Steve Jones



Norman Burns (c), Sanquhar, Dumfries & Galloway, received his 25-year badge with Sanquhar members Billy Townsley, Billy Haddow, George Park, Ian Johnson, John Hughes, Craig Moore, Arron Johnston, Alister Lawrie and Darren Shaw



Andy Collis (c) receives his 25-year badge from Bradford divisional secretary John Rankin, with Halifax green watch looking on



Adge Freeman (c), Exmouth, Devon and Somerset, receives his 25-year badge from branch chair Bob Sturtivant with members of green watch looking on



Stuart Cook (l), receives his 25-year badge from Bradford divisional secretary John Rankin with Fairweather Green white watch looking on



Colin Woolmer (l), blue watch, Romford, London receives his 25-year badge from branch chair Kevin Flanagan



Ron Wilson (r) white watch, Cardiff Central, receives his 25-year badge from regional chair Cerith Griffiths



Martin Critcher (r), white watch, Cardiff Central, receives his 25-year badge from regional chair Cerith Griffiths



Peter Messiter (r), Cleveland, receives his 25-year badge from FBU president Alan McLean at annual conference in Southport

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Organiser of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE 0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.